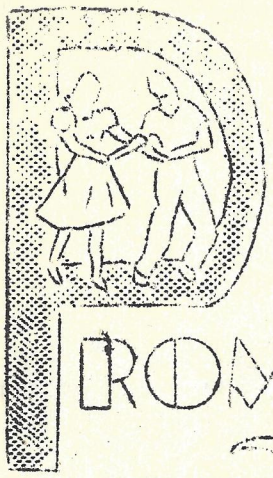
PROMENADE

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN FOLK LORE

VOLUME V ISSUE 4



"The purpose of the American Square-Dance Group is to make available those rich stores of native dance, music, drama and general Americana which together comprise American folk culture; to conduct such activities without regard for race, creed, color or social position; to cooperate with those who hold similar views."

Constitution of the A S D G.

PROMENADE

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Margot Mayo.....Editor
Ruth Gasper.....Editorial
Bob Simon.....Editorial
Hank Leclercq.....Report
Herbert Terry.....Review

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WANTED: ..... Criticism!

During the past few months, style and critical standards have constantly intruded themselves into people's singers' bull sessions. Any two selected folk singers rubbed together in the presence of alcohol generate heat, sparks and - occasionally - some light on the subject.

"Authenticity" vs."interpretation" is debated. The thin line between "projection" and "hamming" is hair-split into a dozen. "Audience appeal" battles with "artistic honesty". So far, however, critical standards in folk music have suffered the proverbial fate of the weather. For all the talk, little has been done about them.

People's music - like any other sort of art - can flourish and grow only through criticism. Criticism in turn can only come from informed audiences, operating on standards widely enough accepted so that each man does not talk to himself.

So much for the truism. As a practical matter, people's music generally and folk music in particular are rapidly reaching the point where if they do not develop their own standards, standards-the wrong ones - will be developed for them.

* * * *

Folk music is becoming big business. A recent Roxy attraction with a feature length film starred Burl Ives - who is expected to do a series of shorts for Disney in coming months. Peter Seeger is under contract for several films, shooting to start in the fall. Dyer-Bennet will open at the ultra-sophistocated "Blue Angel" after Labor Day, and other performers may well follow him into night club and radio work. Lurking among these beckoning green pastures is the "big time" commercial promoter, to whom art is very little more than a commodity.

What almost all night clubs want of art is already clear-- sex and laughs. Radio and film, the great levelers, transmute these into slapstick and romance. Content goes out the window, while form survives only if it is a perfect 36.

A sort of horrible example of the end product of commercialized folk-art unchecked by criticism is

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"cowboy music". These sinewy ballads of a way of life by no means romantic have, at the hands of numerous screen and radio interpreters and their song-writer accomplices, been boiled down into a smooth and syrupy moaning about M' Hoss, My Pal or My Gal.

It is this fate worse than death that awaits folk music unless, by developing a unified and vocal criticism it can beat off the assaults of the Big Money.

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(To be continued next issue.)

*

AROUND THE *Mountain Hill*

This fragment was collected by Alan Swartz from two sources: The first, Sally Hess of Point Pleasant, West Virginia; the second Miss Shirley Allen of Grimms Lodge, West Virginia.

Miss Hess sang a verse and chorus for Alan while we were on a demonstration at Plum Point, New York several years ago. Miss Allen sang the rest in Washington, D.C. Although their homes were but a few miles apart, they were strangers to each other.

The tune is similar to one Margot collected in the Kentucky mountains, although the last phrase is obviously derived from those well-known classics: "You're In The Army Now", and "I Went To The Animal Fair,"

(1)

Apple-jack and sorghum and molasses too
Anyone can stomach that can do more'n I can do.

(Chorus)

Around the mountain hill, around the mountain hill
You're sure to get your eye knocked out around the mountain hill.

(2)

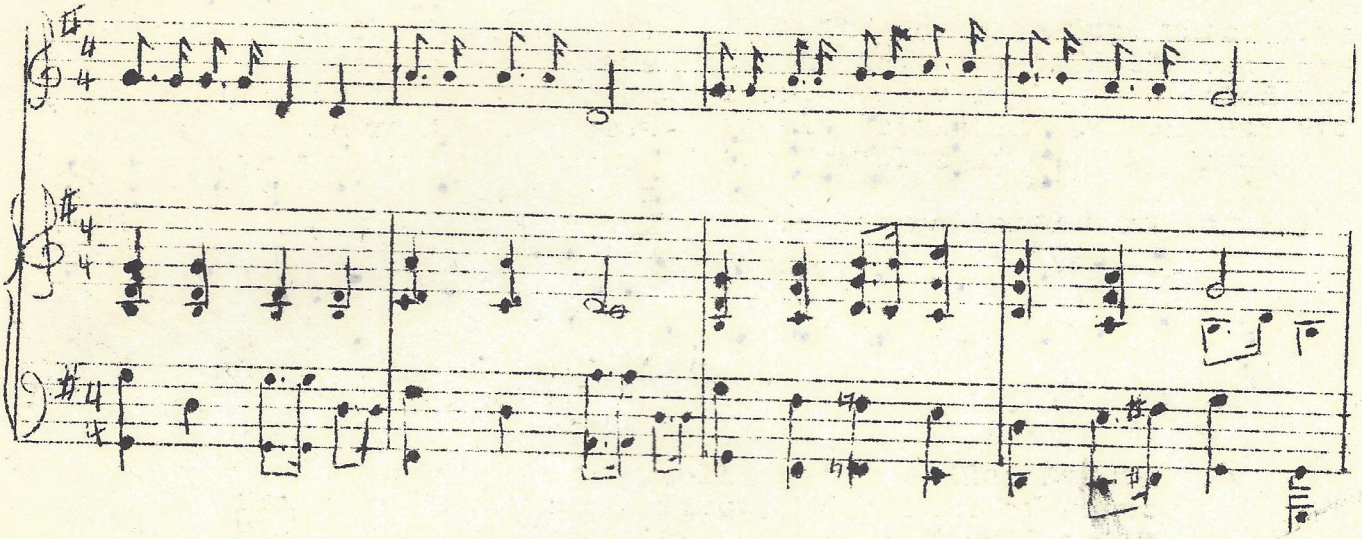
There Bill and Jack awaiting, for some one to go by
They's as soon as swing a stick at you as look you in the eye.

(3)

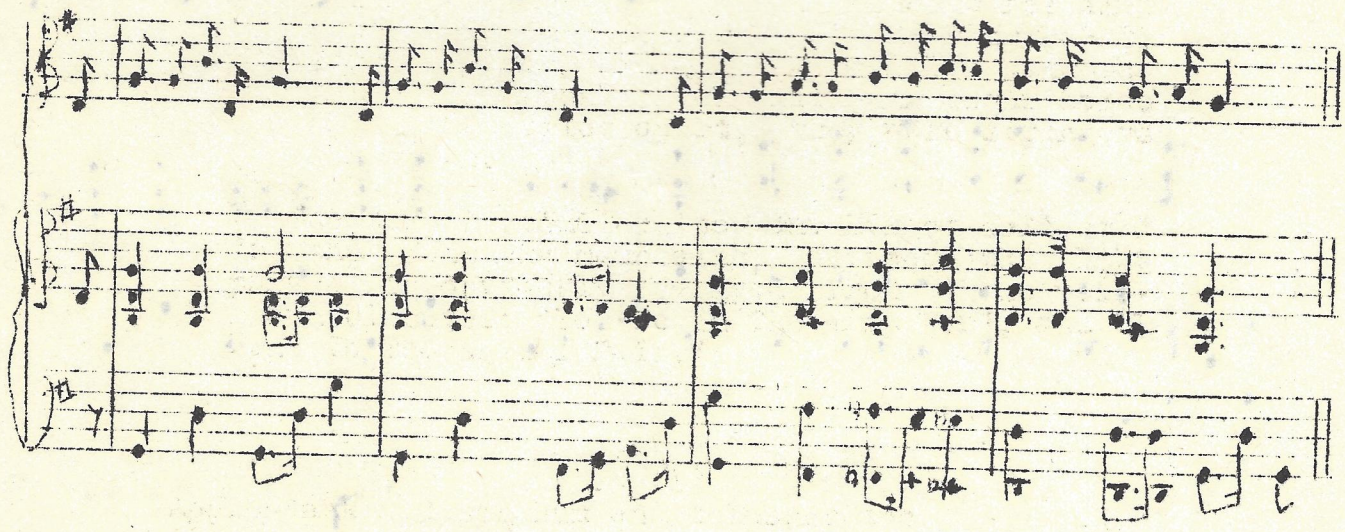
A skunk he come a-runnin', I askked him, "Where you goin'?"
He said, "Those boys around the hill won't let my wife alone."

AROUND THE MOUNTAIN HILL

Verse



Chorus



SOUTHERN RUNNING SET

The "Ruhning Set" is one of the oldest of American folk dances, and one of the most popular. It originated in England and became very popular in the highlands of the South during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. There is no set pattern for the calls of a "Running Set". Each caller uses whatever calls he happens to think of at the moment, and if he can't think of any, he just does the best he can.

CALLS ** LARGE CIRCLE FIGURES

1. All join hands and hold 'em high, pick your feet up and let 'em fly. Circle left.

2. You're goin' wrong, the other way back and make your feet go "Whikety-Whack".

3. Now the ladies to the center and form a ring
Gents on the outside do the same thing,
Ladies circle left, gents circle right.

4. Ladies stop, and gents circle back the other way. Stop on the left side of your partner.

5. Gents raise your hands, ladies duck under, circle left and swing like thunder.

6. Break the ring with a corner swing.

7. Now we'll swap and now we'll trade
My pretty gal for your old maid.

8. Everybody promenade, Ice cream and lemonade.

9. Gents, raise your arms and wring out the dishrag
Now swing your partner as she comes around.

10. Promenade.-- Head couple start the open tunnel figure.-- Duck your heads and watch 'em close.
Or else we'll give you double the dose.
Now leading couple make 'em straight
Promenade, and don't be late.

11. All join hands, and circle to the left.

12. Head lady, get ready to wind up that ball o' yarn.
Wind her good and wind her tight;
And now unwind till you come out right.

13. All join hands, and circle to the left.

14. Everybody balance in, a quart o' whiskey, a pint
O' gin, back to the center, let's try it again.

15. Swing your corner lady, and now your own honey baby.

16. Promenade the lady to an easy chair,
You know where and we don't care.

DESCRIPTION--LARGE CIRCLE FIGURES

1. All the dancers form one large circle around the room. Every gent should have his partner on his right side. Circle in a counterclockwise direction around the hall.

2. Reverse direction. Circle in a clockwise direction stamping your feet to the time of the music.

3. Ladies take two steps towards the center of the circle and join hands. Gents, join hands around the outside of the circle. Ladies circle to the left and gents to the right.

4. Ladies stand still, while the gents circle back in the opposite direction, until they stop on the left side of their own partners.

5. Gents raise their arms, and bring them down in front of the ladies. Then without breaking the circle, everyone circles to the left.

6. Break up the circle and swing your left-hand lady.

7. Then turn and swing your own partners.

8. Gents join right hands with the right hand of their partner, left hand with the left hand of their partner, and move around the outside of the set in a counterclockwise direction, side by side.

9. The gent raises his arms over his head and around to the left, which brings the lady in front of him. Continue until the lady is behind the gent, and finally back in her own place. Then swing your partner.

10. The designated head couple turns around and faces the approaching couples. With hands held high above the heads of the other dancers they move back around the set in a clockwise direction, permitting the other couples to pass under their upraised arms. The other couples, in turn, when they come in the clear, turn around, join hands, and follow the head couple with arms raised high to permit the other couples to pass under. When the head couple has passed over the heads of all the couples, they again turn, this time passing underneath the arms of the oncoming couples. The other couples follow suit until everyone is in the clear again.

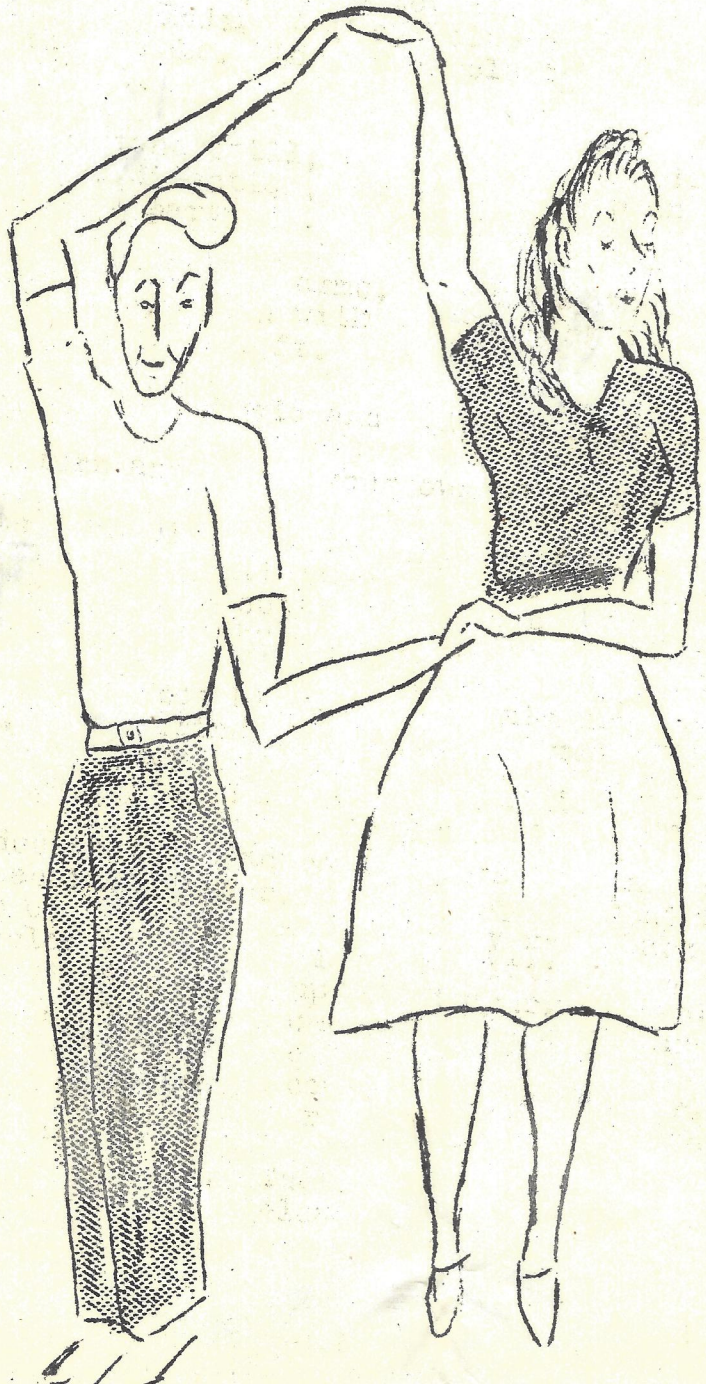
11. After all the couples are promenading again, move back and form one large circle, keeping your partner on your right.

12. The lady separates from her partner, and the entire circle keeps moving to the left, while the head lady winds the line of dancers into a many-ringed coil. When she is in the very center of such a coil, she reverses direction, and unwinds until all the dancers are again in one large circle. (13)

14. Without dropping hands, the dancers move forward four steps toward the center of the circle, and four steps back again.

15. Swing the lady on your left, then turn around and swing your partner.

16. Promenade as explained in figure (8). The dance ends with the gents promenading their partners off the floor.



CENTURY FOLK SINGERS

Near the middle of June, when the official ASDG folk song series was drawing to a close (much too early, it seems, for WNYC), Freddy Simon and one or two other members of the group got the idea of gathering together a small, unofficial group to continue with the programs through June and July. After much encouragement from Margot and WNYC, Freddy gathered a final bunch of members, consisting of: Freddy Simon, herself; Freddy Snydover (Lynn); Gene Levitt; Gene Saletan (Jerry); and Estelle, a non ASDG friend of Freddy Simon; Stuart Jamieson and myself.

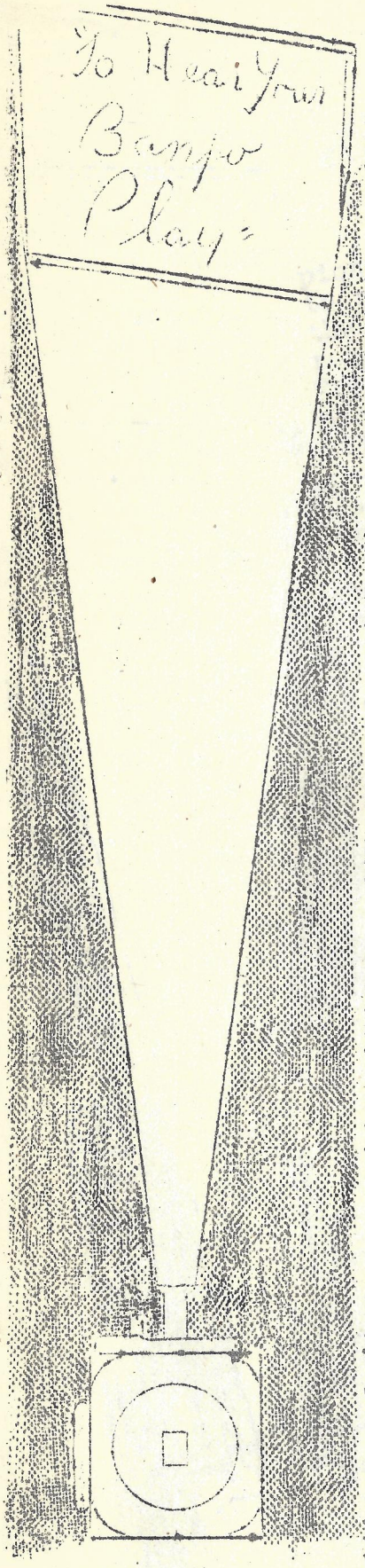
Due to the size and nature of the group, we limited ourselves to a fifteen minute program. After much wrangling, we decided on the title "Century Folk Singers", for the lack of a better one, and on a different day and time we started our series.

Gene Levitt was our accompanist, playing either his five string banjo or his guitar in accompaniment to either himself or to other members of the group. Stuart filled in "orchestra" with his mandolin. The two Freddys were our material-digger-uppers and program planners, with Freddy Simon writing the blurbs and, deservedly, acting as official manager of the group.

With two hectic rehearsals a week and another even more so before each broadcast at the studio, we tackled our series. Apprehensive and pessimistic about the outcome, we nevertheless came through our series with flying colors. That, if anything else, was gratifying.

Our last program fell on July 25th, and it was with a sigh of relief we put our shoes back on (Ed note: They had to take their shoes off to maintain studio silence.) and walked out of the studio.- Glad it was over, we were also sorry. We would miss all the fun we had had delivering the programs to our listeners. Speaking for all seven of us, I think I can say that we hope our listeners got as much pleasure out of listening to us as we received bringing these folk songs to them.

Frank Lefevre



REVIEW by Herb Terry

Ever since Francis James Child made his pioneer excursions into the southern highlands, to rescue from oblivion the songs and ballads of the early American settlers, a steady stream of researchers have followed the trail he blazed. From their labors have issued a host of books, pictures and phonograph records preserving for all time the songs and dances of the American people handed down from an earlier age. Now, for the first time, an attempt has been made to integrate some of this material so as to present it as a living reality, part of the daily existence of actual people, rather than as forgotten curiosities destined for some museum.

Brought to life by virtue of the motion picture screen under the title "To Hear Your Banjo Play," the experiment is exciting and moving to watch. Here are folk songs presented straightforwardly, without pretension or quaintness. The dances are done with enthusiasm and spirit but without elaborate embellishments designed for "stage appeal." The unifying theme of the production is simple: By question and answer, Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger show that America's early musical heritage is not lost or dying, and as Pete sings and talks, the camera proves it to us.

We see Mrs. Texas Gladden singing "The Farmer's Curst Wife," and at an old fashioned picnic an old spiritual is joined in by all, old and young. Then Woody Guthrie, Butch Hawes, Brownee McGhee and Sonny Terry sing to the background of other scenes; old farm buildings, and railroad roundhouses. The photography captures the individual moods expertly, and finally shifts us back to the "Big Town" where we see a Tennesee running set with the ASDG.

Although only about fifteen minutes long, the film is worth a special trip for anyone interested in American folk lore. The direction and production were handled by Irving Lerner and Willard Van Dyke for Folk Song Productions, all of whom deserve a cheer.

While it is expected that the film will be shown in this country shortly, it is primarily intended for distribution abroad under the State Department auspices as an aid to international understanding.

Herb

Record Reviews

Two contrasting albums of Negro folk songs, recently issued, point up the striking difference between genuine, unadulterated folk-singing and the conventional treatment of the folk song on the concert stage.

"Spirituals", released by Disc, presents the religious songs of the Southern Negro in an exciting and natural manner, as they are sung in the churches of the South today. And as they have been sung for many generations. There are no posed, affected, dramatic effects in the singing in this album. Instead, there is an almost primitive fierceness which is hypnotic, to say the least.

The singers in these recordings belong to two seperate groups. The Thrasher Wonders, a family of sisters and brothers who grew up in Alabama, and the Two Gospel Keys. The Thrasher Wonders started singing as a trio when three of the "young'uns" were tiny tots. Their mother, Mrs. Clara Thrasher was a member of her church choir... and was determined that her children would love and know music. In 1939 she brought the children to Washington, D.C., to sing at the White House, and in 1940 the family came on to New York City. They sang at the World's Fair and over the air. The family group changes as additional children make their debuts into the family circle. There are now eleven children, but the album notes do not state how many are performing on the records.

The Two Gospel Keys, Emma Daniel and Mother Jones, are two elderly ladies who have done considerable traveling around the South and the North, singing in churches and, as itenerant singers, on the streets of the various cities in which they were appearing. They recorded two of the six ten inch records in this album: "I Love Traveling", and "Charity". The Thrasher Wonders sing the others: "Jonah", "Jesus I Love You", "Motherless Child", and "Blind Old Barnabus".

This album is really a joy and no collection of American folk music can be complete without it.

In contrast to this remarkable set of recordings is the "American Spirituals" with Kenneth Spencer as the recording artist. Kenneth's magnificent voice is all the excuse anyone needs for buying the album immediately, for it is worth the price just to be able to hear him sing whenever you want to. But one wishes, after hearing the art-song arrangements of these popular and better-known spirituals, that more thought had gone into preparing and selecting the songs to be included in the album. Some of the less popularized spirituals are equally beautiful and perhaps more important than those contained in this Sonora release, (album no. MS-478).

Kenneth, as usual, does a fine job, singing with sincerity and with musicianship. We particularly enjoy the "Every Mail Day" and the ever-lovely "City Called Heaven". The remaining selections, "Hear de Lambs a-Cryin'", "Water Boy", "Go Down Moses", "There's a Man Goin' Round Takin' Names", "Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho", "Goin' to Ride up in the Chariot", "Little David Play on yo' Harp", "Black Sheep, Where Yo Left yo' Lambs?", and "Deep River" are all presented in the traditional, art-song arrangements, and will undoubtedly appeal to the average habitue of the concert hall. But those of us who love and respect Kenneth Spencer, as an artist and as a man, hope that he will soon bring out albums more truely representative of the folk of America.

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Ralph Page, co-author of that charming book, "The Country Dance" has made an album of New Hampshire square dances for Disc. The album is to be released on May 25th, and our bet is that it will be a good one. We'll review it soon.

Dear Editor:

"Can you go to a demonstration at Mohegan next Saturday night?", Margot asked me at our last Sunday evening session. "I guess so," I replied. That was the beginning.

After getting permission to go and talking it over with Ruth and Tex, we anxiously awaited our meeting at Grand Central station with Freddy, Whitey, Peggy, Pat, Herbie, Felix and Little Joe.

Once at our hotel in Peekskill, we changed and were driven to the Mohegan recreation hall.

What a night! We danced almost steadily from 9 PM till 1 AM. We demonstrated a few square sets and quadrilles - the "Preakness Quadrille", "Silent Couple", etc. and mixed with the Moheganites to do "Gal From Arkansas" "Old Saint Nick", etc. and a few running sets like "Shoo Fly", "Oh Susanna" etc. We also demonstrated a few foreign dances. Whitey did most of the calling with Hervie filling in.

We had a heck of a lot of fun and nearly laughed ourselves sick at the way they did "Shoo Fly".

The next morning, while we were swimming, Josh White came along in a canoe and sang us a few songs. So ended a swell time and a good demonstration.

Hank

To The Hills

Margot Mayo and several members of ASDG are, at this writing, on a tour to Kentucky and South Carolina. The mission is to collect songs and calls and attend a folk festival.

That this issue of PROMENADE may not be up to par, can be attributed to Margot's much felt departure.

GUEST EDITOR

Bob Claiborne, who was kind enough to write our editorial this issue was born in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, England, of American parents. After three months of growing on English soil, he and his family returned to the States. He has lived in New York, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Connecticut.

After majoring in economics and psychology at M.I.T., Antioch, and N.Y.U. Bob was an office worker, steel worker and organizer for a shipyard workers union. He also did some reporting for a Puerto Rican newspaper and for variety, spent some time making wedding cake ornaments.

In 1934 he started playing and singing as an amateur, studying the piano and violin at the same time. He emerged as a professional entertainer in 1945 accepting bookings at parties, union and I.W.O. groups.

Claiborne was one of the organizers of People's Songs, whose aim is to popularize and publish folk music. They also maintain a very complete library for its members. Peter Seeger, on of our own boys, is the National Director.

Bob is also a charter member of People's Artists Inc., a cooperative booking agency organized by People's Songs and Stage for Action for the benefit of its entertainer members.

At the present time Bob books through People's Artists Inc. and teaches guitar.

One of his claims to fame is "Listen Mr. Bilbo" authored by him and Adrienne, his wife. He has recently finished what promises to be another hit, "I Got A Job On The Rankin Committee."